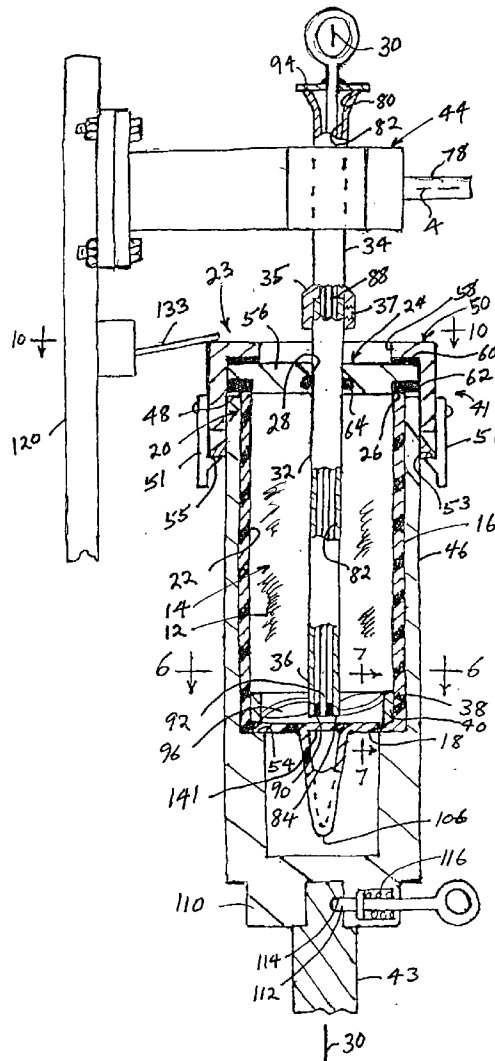
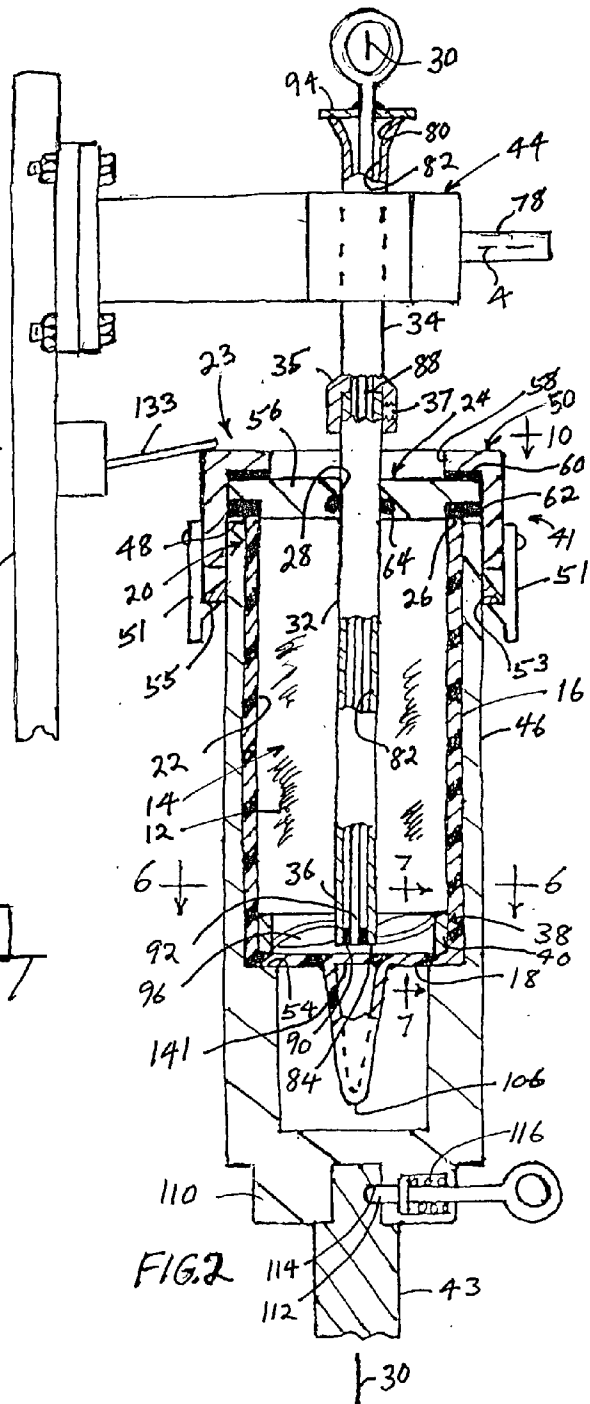
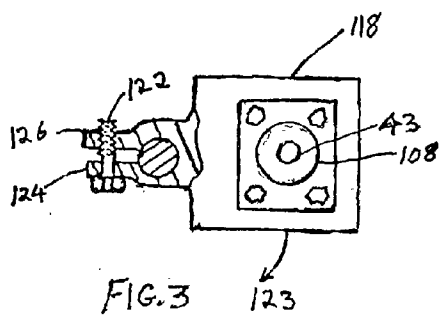
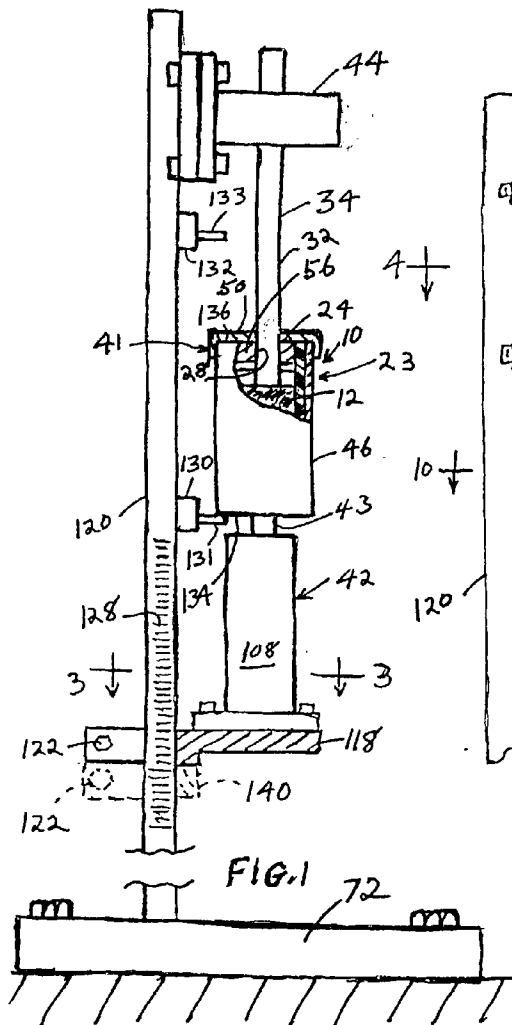
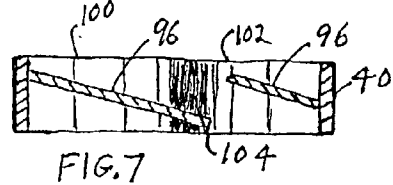
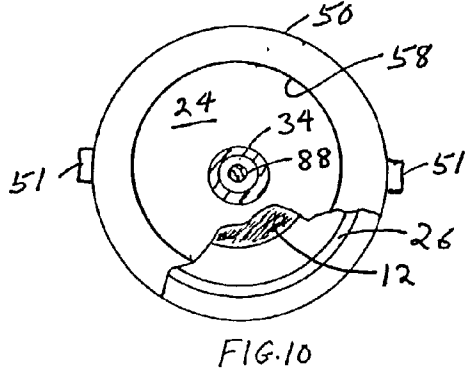
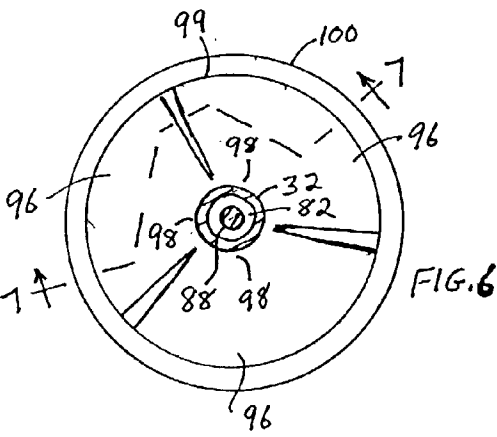
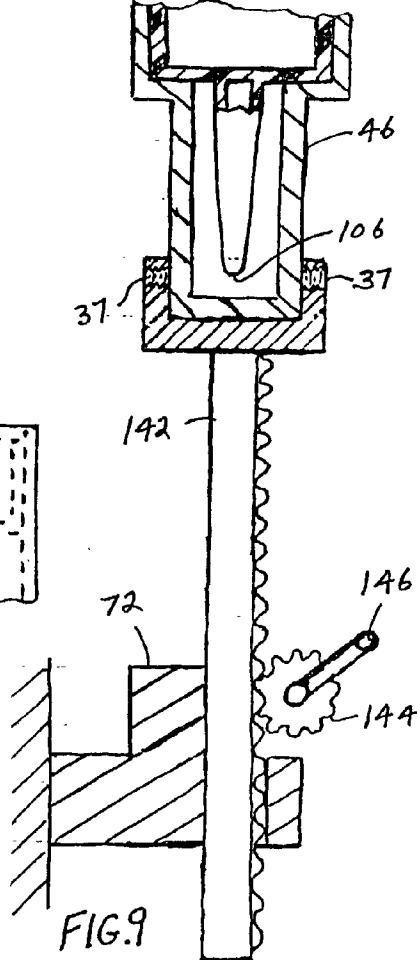
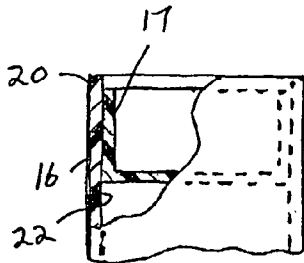
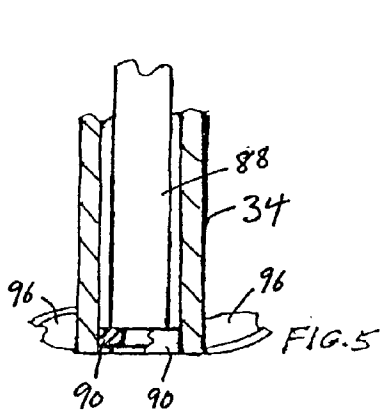
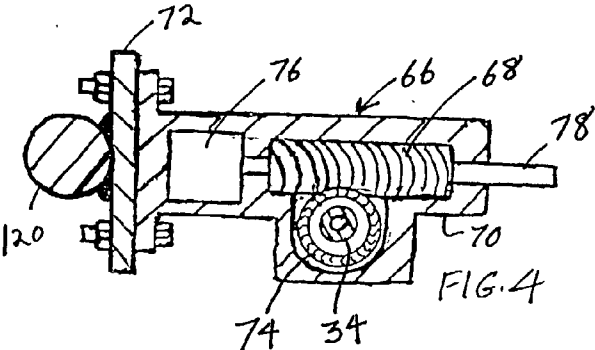


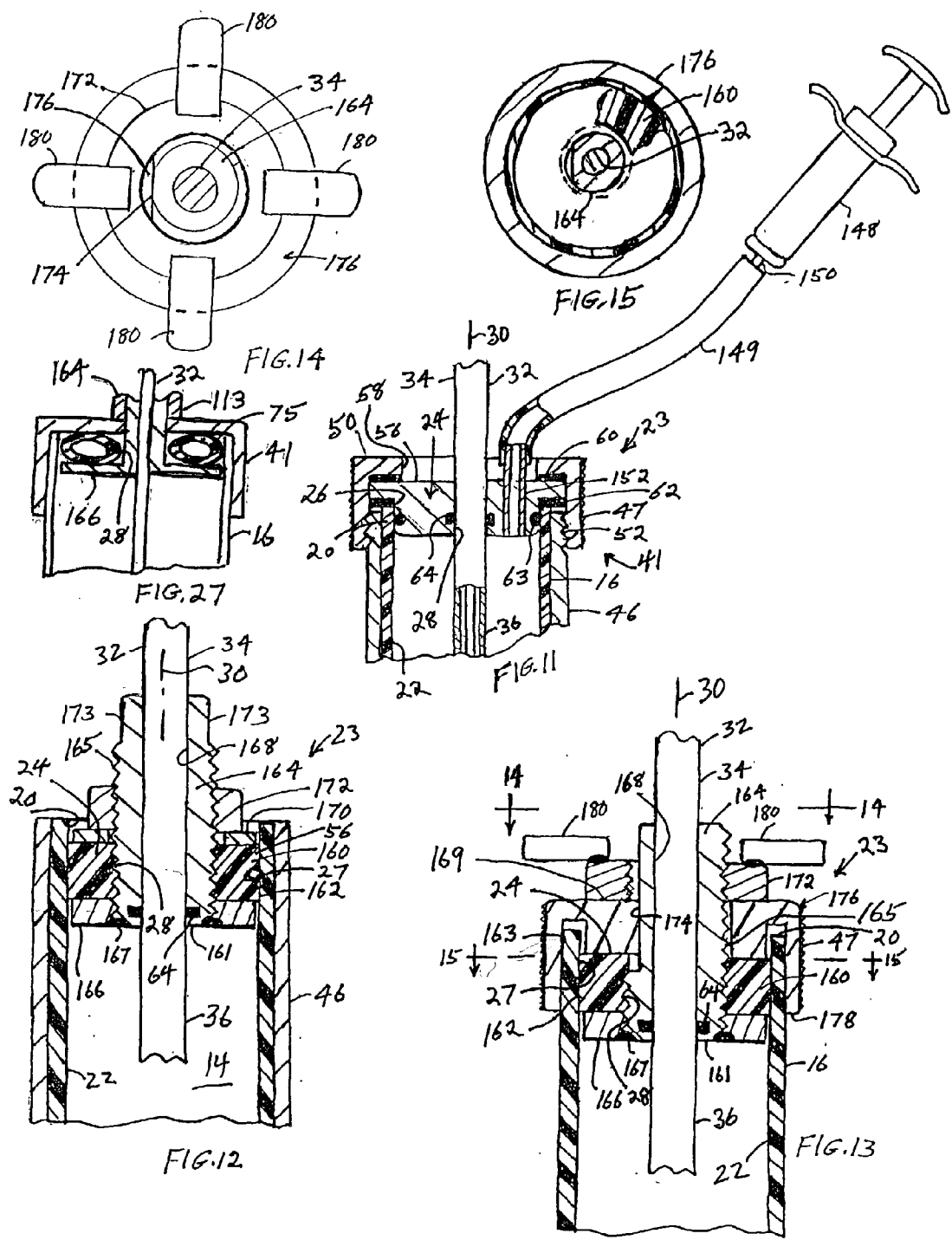


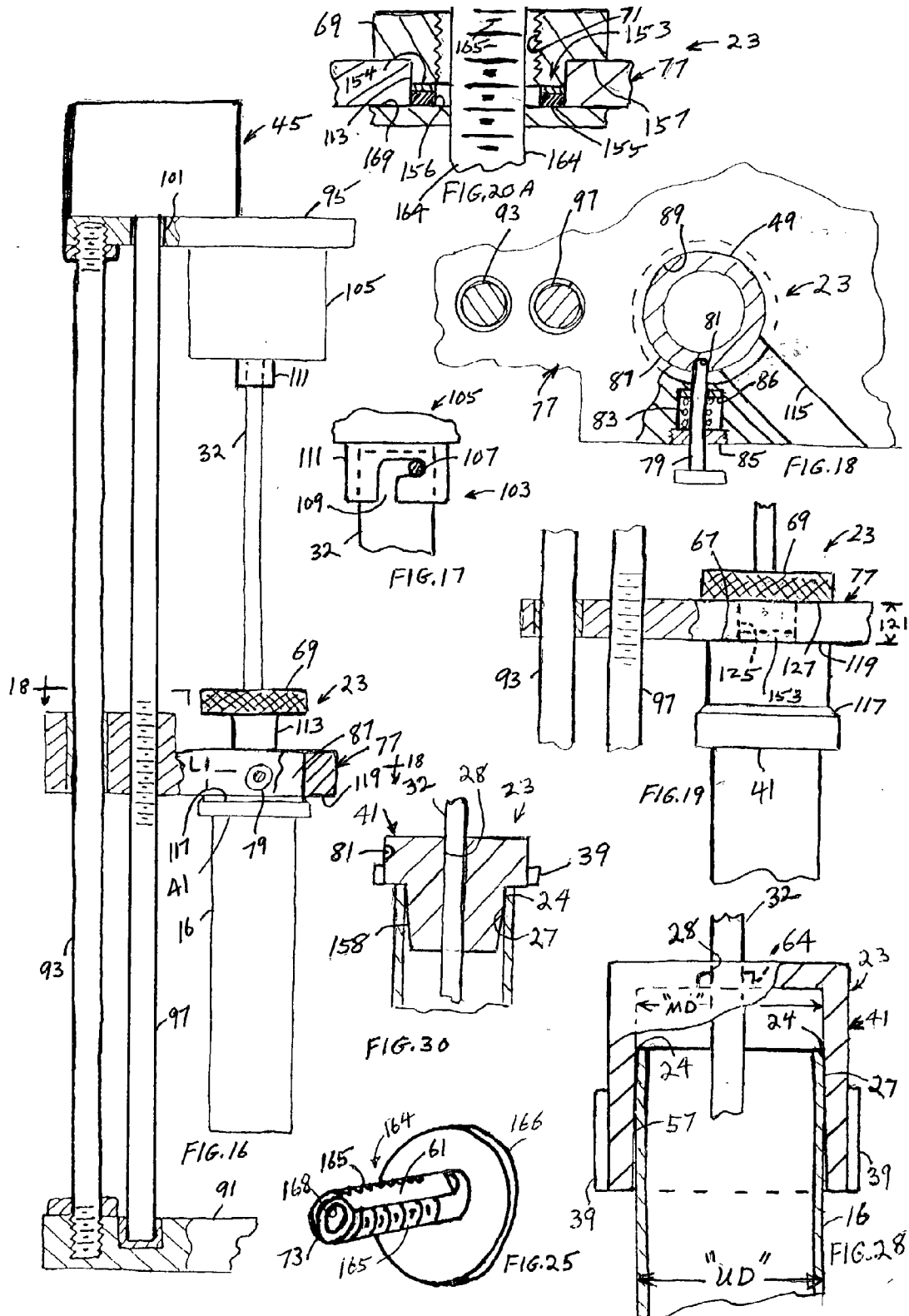
(43) **Pub. Date:** **May 29, 2003**











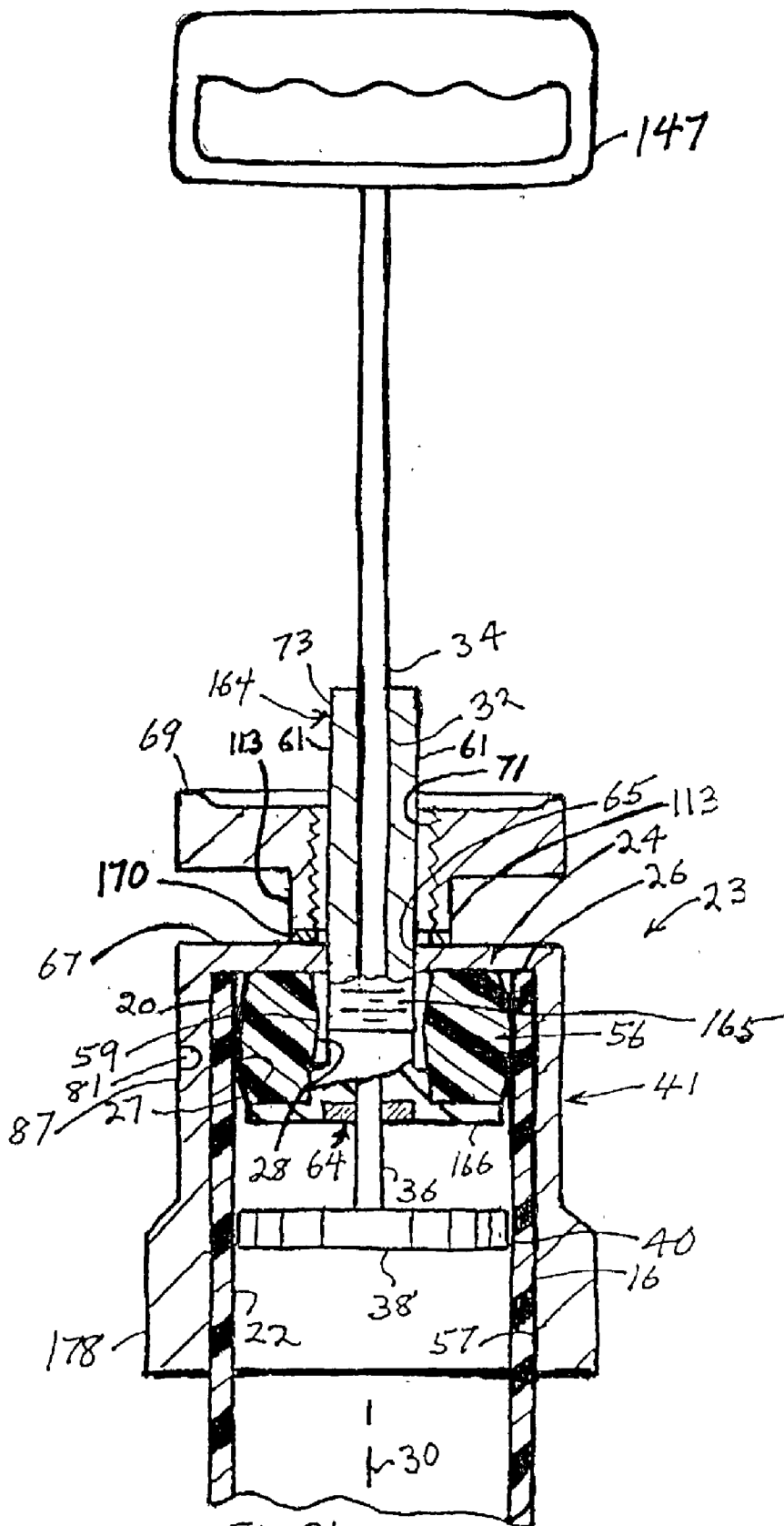


FIG. 31

MIXING APPARATUS AND METHOD

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of applicants Ser. No. 09/563,465 of same title and filed on May 2, 2000, now abandoned, and further is a continuation-in-part of applicants pending Ser. No. 10/115,330 of same title and filed on Apr. 2, 2002.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field

[0003] This invention concerns a method and apparatus for mixing any of a wide variety of liquid or particulate materials such as colorant, e.g., pigment or organic dye, sand, grout, catalyst for two part caulking, or the like preferably in solution or suspension form, into viscous work material, particularly caulking compound, wherein the structural mixing components are of unique but simple design and are adapted to accomplish the mixing very rapidly and directly within the work material retail container, i.e., in-situ.

[0004] In the use of certain materials such as caulking or other sealing materials which are sold in plastic dispensing tubes such as "DAP® Acrylic Latex Caulk Plus Silicone", it is often desirable to color the material to match, e.g., the wall color being applied to a room. For example, in the use of conventional white caulking material, as soon as the material sets up sufficiently, usually about two hours or longer, the material can be painted the same color as the room. Where the paint is of a light shade in particular, it may be difficult to cover the material completely without multiple paint coats. Also, it is often necessary to do some additional caulking after the final coat of paint has been applied. In that event, the white caulking has to be painted over as the final step. Consequently, some paint dealers have undertaken to mix colorant into the caulking material by hand for certain customers, but considerable time and effort is involved and often results in inferior mixing and considerable clean up time.

[0005] The present invention provides a quick, effective, convenient and cleaner method and apparatus for substantially automatically performing the mixing operation.

[0006] 2. Prior Art

[0007] Applicant is unaware of any prior apparatus or method of the type disclosed and claimed herein which is designed to mix colorant directly into caulking compound or the like contained in its retail tube.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention, in one of its preferred embodiments comprises a mixer head means having a mixer shaft rotatably or non-rotatably mounted axially therethrough and having a mixing impeller or blade means affixed to a distal end thereof, a proximal end of said shaft being adapted for engagement with a power source for reciprocating said shaft and impeller means axially, said head means having a first annular sealing surface adapted for making a sealing connection to a second annular sealing surface on an open filler end portion of a tube of viscous caulking compound or the like whereby the combination of said head means and tube is completely portable and independent of other structure, and wherein said shaft with said

mixing impeller or blade means is adapted to be reciprocated thru the viscous compound contained in the tube substantially the entire length of the tube to rapidly and intimately mix the compound with colorant or other additive material placed in the tube.

[0009] In certain preferred embodiments:

[0010] (a) the blade means is provided at its periphery with a wiping surface adapted to rotatably and longitudinally slide against or in close proximity to the inner surface of the tube whereby no significant amount of unmixed compound or colorant remains;

[0011] (b) a colorant supply means is provided to inject the colorant into the compound during reciprocation of the shaft and blade means thru the compound;

[0012] (c) the supply means of (b) above comprises passage means extending longitudinally thru the shaft whereby colorant can be either pressure injected or gravity fed at a desired rate therethrough into the compound either before or during rotation and/or longitudinal mixing movement of the shaft thru the compound;

[0013] (d) the shaft with mixer blade means is rotatably mounted and supported on rotative power means in a longitudinally stationary position wherein mixer head means is provided for holding the tube filler end and wherein linear power means is provided for longitudinally reciprocating said head means and tube relative to the shaft and mixer blade means;

[0014] (e) power means is provided for selectively reversing rotation of the shaft and blade means during the mixing operation to afford maximum mixing turbulence to the compound;

[0015] (f) said head means includes rotative power means connected to said proximal end of said shaft for rotating said shaft; and

[0016] (g) said head means is provided with structure for connecting it to an apparatus which can reciprocate the head and tube relative to said shaft and impeller.

[0017] The present mixing method in one preferred embodiment employing a retail, off-the-shelf tube of caulking material wherein the tube has a puncturably sealed dispenser end section, a filler end section having surface portions defining a fill opening into the tube, a thrust cap sealingly, slidably mounted in said filler end section, and further employing a mixer head means adapted to seal against said surface portions of said filler end section during the mixing operation, wherein said head means has mixer shaft means rotatably and axially slidably mounted therethrough, and wherein a mixer impeller means is fixed to a distal end of said mixer shaft means for rotation and axial movement therewith, said method comprising the steps of (a) removing said thrust cap from said tube, (b) adding additive into said tube, (c) connecting said head means to and sealingly against said surface portions of said filler end section to seal said fill opening with said blade means inside of said tube and to provide a portable independent combination of said head means and tube, (d) starting rotation and

relative reciprocation of said mixer shaft means within said tube and continuing the rotation and reciprocation for a desired mixing period, (e) removing said tube and the colored compound therein from said shaft, impeller means and head means, and (f) replacing said thrust cap in said filler end section to retain the mixed compound and additive in said tube until use.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] The invention will be further understood from the following description and drawings herein wherein the structures depicted are not drawn to scale or actual relative proportions and wherein portions thereof are cross-sectioned or broken away for clarity, wherein:

[0019] **FIG. 1** is a partially sectioned schematic view of an overall mixer apparatus-including a fluid, air or hydraulic cylinder for reciprocating the mixing head means and caulking tube;

[0020] **FIG. 2** is a longitudinal partial cross-sectional view of one preferred type of mixing head means for carrying out the present mixing operation wherein the head means and tube are in the up position and wherein the head means has just-tripped the top limit switch to reverse the hydraulic cylinder stroke;

[0021] **FIG. 3** is a view taken along line 3-3 of **FIG. 1** in the direction of the arrows with portions broken away for clarity;

[0022] **FIG. 4** is a top view of one useful type of worm gear transmission power means for driving the mixing shaft means taken along line 4-4 of **FIG. 2**, with the gear housing top removed for clarity;

[0023] **FIG. 5** is an enlarged, for clarity, distal end portion of the mixing blade means and colorant injector piston of **FIG. 2**;

[0024] **FIG. 6** is a cross-sectional view taken along line 6-6 of **FIG. 2** in the direction of the arrows and showing the mixer blade means;

[0025] **FIG. 7** is a cross-sectional view taken along line 7-7 in **FIG. 6** in the direction of the arrows;

[0026] **FIG. 8** is a view of the filler end of a typical off-the-shelf caulking compound tube such as DAP® with portions broken away to show the thrust cap in place and which, when pressured further into the tube (down in **FIG. 8**) by a caulking gun, forces the compound out thru the dispenser nozzle of the tube;

[0027] **FIG. 9** is a side view, partially sectioned, of a rack and pinion type power means for reciprocating the tube;

[0028] **FIG. 10** is a view of the mixer head means taken along line 10-10 of **FIG. 2** in the direction of the arrows with portions broken away for clarity;

[0029] **FIG. 11** is a view of the mixer head means on the tube filler end as in **FIG. 2** showing a hand held variation of the colorant injection means;

[0030] **FIG. 12** is a cross-sectional view of the proximal end of the tube and a variation of the mixing head means including a tube holder section;

[0031] **FIG. 13** is a view as in **FIG. 12** showing a more preferred type of mixer head means;

[0032] **FIG. 14** is a top view of the head means of **FIG. 13** taken along line 14-14 thereof in the direction of the arrows;

[0033] **FIG. 15** is a cross-sectional view taken along line 15-15 of **FIG. 13** in the direction of the arrows;

[0034] **FIG. 16** is a partially sectioned side elevation view of an electrical motor powered reciprocation apparatus with the present preferred mixing head structure mounted on a carriage means;

[0035] **FIG. 17** is an elevation view of a useful means for quickly connecting the mixer shaft to a rotative power source;

[0036] **FIG. 18** is a view taken generally along line 18-18 of **FIG. 16** in the direction of the arrows;

[0037] **FIG. 19** is a view as in **FIG. 16** of a variation in the connection of the carriage means to the mixer head means;

[0038] **FIG. 20** is a longitudinal cross-section of a preferred head means;

[0039] **FIG. 20A** is an enlarged cross sectional view of the portion of head 23 which clamps onto carriage 77;

[0040] **FIG. 21** is a cross-sectional view taken along line 21-21 of **FIG. 20** in the direction of the arrows and showing only a portion of body 56 in elastomeric cross-section;

[0041] **FIG. 22** is a view of a highly preferred impeller taken along line 22-22 in **FIG. 20** in the direction of the arrows;

[0042] **FIG. 23** is a cross-sectional view of the impeller taken along line 23-23 in **FIG. 22** in the direction of the arrows;

[0043] **FIG. 24** is a cross-sectional view of a preferred shaft seal mounted in the bushing;

[0044] **FIG. 25** is a perspective view of the bushing of **FIG. 20**;

[0045] **FIG. 26** is a top view of a multiple head carrying carriage;

[0046] **FIG. 27** is a partial view of the head means of **FIG. 20** and showing a variation in the structure of seal body 56;

[0047] **FIG. 28** shows a variation in mixing head structure;

[0048] **FIG. 29** shows in an alternative tightening means structure for knob means 69 in **FIG. 20**;

[0049] **FIG. 30** is a cross-sectional view of a variation of the tapered seal construction of **FIG. 28** wherein inner portions of the tube filler end wall provide a component of the seal; and

[0050] **FIG. 31** is essentially the same as **FIG. 20** but wherein the shaft is provided with a handle for non-rotative mixing.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0051] Referring to the drawings and with particular reference to the claims hereof, the present apparatus in one

preferred form and generally designated **10** is well adapted for mixing liquid, solid or suspension colorant or other material with viscous work material **12** such as caulk which is contained in a reservoir **14** of an elongated tube **16**, typically of plastic, between a puncturably sealed dispensing end **18** and a filler end **20** normally sealed by a thrust cap seal such as **17**. The reservoir is provided by a cylindrical inner surface **22** of the tube and has a substantially uniform diameter throughout its length. One typical caulk tube size is approximately 1½ O.D. and 8½ in., long.

[0052] With reference to all of the embodiments shown herein the apparatus in its generic sense comprises mixer head means of metal or plastic material and generally designated **23** having a tube end seal means generally designated **24** adapted to be brought into static engagement by pressure cap means generally designated **41** with wall portions such as the top rim **26** or the upper portions **27** of the interior or outer surfaces of the filler end **20** of the tube to prevent leakage of the work material from the tube during the mixing operation. Bore means **28** is formed thru the seal means **24** substantially on a longitudinal axis **30** of the tube, and an elongated mixer shaft means **32** is mounted thru **28** for both rotational and axial motion with respect to the seal means **24** and tube **16**. This shaft means has a proximal end **34** lying axially outwardly of the seal means and has a distal end **36** lying within the reservoir **14**. Mixer impeller means **38** is mounted on said distal end and has a periphery **40** adapted to lie closely adjacent to or in sliding contact with cylindrical inner surface **22** of the tube. The above seal means **24**, bore means **28**, shaft means **32**, impeller means **38** and pressure cap means **41** constitute the basic structure of the head means **23**. Power means such as **42** is provided for axially moving, in a relative sense, shaft means **32** and impeller **38** substantially completely thru the reservoir of material in a reciprocating manner and power means such as **44** is provided for rotating the shaft **32** and impeller **38** as they are being moved axially thru the material.

[0053] In the embodiment shown in **FIGS. 1 and 2** the pressure cap means **41** comprises a cylindrical holder section **46** and a pressure cap section **50**. The caulking tube is dropped, dispensing end **18** first, with a loose fit between the holder section and tube to allow easy removal of the tube after mixing. In the embodiment of **FIG. 2**, the top rim **26** of the tube preferably extends slightly above the top rim **48** of the holder section whereby when a pressure cap section **50** is forced down onto the seal means **24**, the seal means will seal the tube filler end **20** and said cap section will clamp the ends **20** and **18** of the tube between the seal **24** and a circular ledge **54** on the holder section interior wall. This clamping will prevent rotation of the tube during the mixing operation wherein rotation of the mixer impeller and compound tends to drag the tube into rotation.

[0054] In the embodiment of **FIG. 11** a special type of tube end seal means is shown wherein the seal body **56** thereof can be glass, preferably tempered and tough, or clear plastic, and the pressure cap section **50** is formed with a large opening **58** such as to afford a visual inspection of the progress and extent of the colorant mixing operation. An annular cushion **60** of elastomeric material, preferably silicone lubricated, is provided, but not essential, and which, in cooperation with annular elastomeric seal ring **62** cushions the seal body **56**. It is noted that where glass is not used, cushion **60** still has utility in providing a slippery surface to

facilitate tightening of cap section **50** where threads are employed as shown in **FIG. 11**, without tending to rotate the seal body **56** and seal ring **62**. One or more additional seals such as O-rings **63** may be mounted on **56** if needed.

[0055] Shaft means **32** is rotatably mounted thru seal body **56** in all of the embodiments shown, which body is preferably provided with a mixer shaft seal **64** such as an O-ring or other annular ring type seal of composition and configuration which affords an axially sliding seal as well as one which wipes the viscous material from the shaft during reciprocating of the caulking tube.

[0056] The upper or proximal end **34** of the shaft preferably is mounted thru a rotative power means **44** which can rotate the shaft **32** selectively and substantially instantly in either direction and at any desired rpm, e.g. 600-800 rpm, such that maximum mixing turbulence can be imparted to the work material. One preferred power means is shown in **FIG. 4** as a worm gear transmission **66** having a worm shaft **68** rotatably mounted in a housing **70** affixed to a base or frame means **72** of any desired construction which supports the structural components of the present apparatus. Shaft **32** is affixed to a worm gear **74** which mates with shaft **68** and is rotatable thereby. Shaft **68** may be driven by an electric motor **76**, preferably variable speed, or by, e.g., reversible electric hand held drill or the like, either house current or battery powered, with its chuck coupled to shaft extension **78**, or by a hand crank coupled to **78**, all such shaft rotating means being termed herein as power means.

[0057] The outermost end **80** of shaft **32** preferably is funnel shaped for facilitating the loading of colorant into passage **82** which is generally axially provided thru shaft **32** and exits thru the inner end **84** of **32**. A colorant injection piston rod **88** and annular seal ring **90** affixed to the inner end portion **92** thereof is slidable down into passage **82** and may be employed to forcibly eject colorant which has been loaded into passage **82**, into the work material. Rod **88** is preferably provided with a stop means such as collar **94** affixed thereto to allow ring **90** to substantially completely wipe passage **82** clear of colorant but not to allow **90** to pass beyond end **84** of **32** and become damaged. Shaft portion **34** is preferably split and provided with a socket **35** and set screw **37** to allow removal of the shaft from **44** for facilitating cleaning or replacement with a different size impeller blade means **38** and seal means **24**.

[0058] The mixer impeller or blade means **38** preferably has multiple, e.g., **25** blades **96** of any desired shape such as shown in **FIGS. 6 and 7** and having their radially inner portions **98** affixed to shaft means **32** and their outer radial portions **99** affixed to cylindrical rim **100**. This rim provides peripheral surface **40** which functions to smoothly slide on inner surface **22** of the tube rotationally and linearly to stabilize **32** and **38** and to wipe surface **22** of compound and colorant during the mixing operation. Rim **100** preferably extends slightly above the blades **96** at their upper portions **102** and slightly below the blades at their lower portions **104** such that at the ends of the reciprocation travel, rim **100** will, in the event said travel is slightly unintentionally over extended, engage dispensing end **18** or seal means **24** before the rotating blades can make contact with either or both of **18** or **24** and cause damage thereto or to the blades. It is noted that end **18** is typically of thin plastic such that an operator can easily puncture it with a nail or the like pushed thru the opened nozzle tip **106** when ready for use.

[0059] Referring to FIGS. 1-3, the power or lift means 42 preferably is the piston 43 and an automatically two way operating hydraulic or air cylinder 108, and is connected to the base 110 of the holder 46 preferably by a quick disconnect coupling such as pin 112 and socket 114. Compression spring 116 urges pin 112 into 114. Such a coupling allows a quick change of holder 46 to accommodate tubes of different sizes.

[0060] In this embodiment, cylinder 108 is mounted on a foot member 118 which is clamped to a stanchion 120 of base or frame means 72 by bolt means 122 slidable thru an aperture in leg 124 and threaded thru a threaded aperture in leg 126. When 122 is loosened, member 118 and attached cylinder 108 and holder 46 can be rotated to the side to allow easy removal or loading of a tube in holder 46. Member 118 can also be slid up or down on stanchion 120 to position holder 46 in the precise vertical position to receive a tube. In this regard, ruler markings 128 can be provided on the stanchion to make easier the proper vertical positioning of 118 for each size tube.

[0061] It is apparent that for this embodiment, where tubes of different lengths are used, the travel of piston 43 must be adjusted to give the proper reciprocating stroke length to holder 46, relative to the vertically stationary mixer impeller 38. For this purpose, a cylinder 108 is selected which can readily give the maximum piston stroke required for the longest retail caulking tube which might be used by tradesmen. At the time of this writing about 12 to 14 inches of piston stroke would appear to be more than is needed for the most common reservoir length of retailed tubes of caulking material.

[0062] In order to adjust and control the piston stroke length and direction, electrical limit switches 130 and 132 vertically adjustably mounted on frame 72 are adapted to engage their arms 131 and 133 respectively with the bottom 134 and top 136 respectively of holder 46 at the prescribed limits of its reciprocation and, by means of solenoid valves in the hydraulic or air system which are electrically connected to the switches, reverse the direction of hydraulic or air fluid flow and the direction of the piston stroke. Control means are also provided to adjust the speed of the piston reciprocation. In practice, a stroke speed of from about 4 to about 20 seconds per complete up-and-down cycle is desirable, but slower or faster speeds may, of course, be used.

[0063] In the operation of the apparatus, a holder 46 of proper dimensions for receiving a particular size caulking tube is connected to piston 43. Foot member 118 is vertically adjusted on stanchion 120 to vertically position the holder where the piston stroke can accommodate the required full up-and-down travel of the holder with room to spare such that impeller 38 can, be extracted from the tube after mixing is complete. The limit switches 130, 132 are then vertically adjusted on stanchion 120 of frame 72 and locked into position for being actuated by the bottom and top alternately of the holder at the precise moment that impeller 38 is at the prescribed ends of its reciprocation stroke or travel. The device is now ready to receive a caulking tube 16 from which a thrust cap seal 17 has been removed by, e.g., applying pressure to the tube sides which pops 17 out of the tube.

[0064] In order to facilitate vertical loading of the tube into the holder and removing it therefrom, the foot member

118, after loosening bolt 122, is swung to the side 123 such that the holder and tube can clear impeller 38 and any other structure of the device which might be in the way. When it is desirable to maintain the precise vertical position of 118 such as when the device is needed to mix several tubes of the same size, a positioning collar 140 as shown by dotted line in FIG. 1 may be employed to support 118 while it is being rotated.

[0065] As shown in FIG. 9 other types of reciprocating power means may be employed such as rack 142 and pinion gear 144 wherein 144 may be driven by reversible motor means and the travel of 142 controlled by switches such as 130 and 132. Gear 144 may also be fitted within a hand crank 146 if desired.

[0066] In the embodiment of FIG. 11, the colorant fluid may be contained in a syringe 148 and a plastic tube 149 provided and connecting the syringe nozzle 150 to a pipe 152 fixed thru the seal body 56. The syringe can be used to inject colorant into the tube before the mixing starts or during the mixing, or both.

[0067] In a related embodiment, tube 149 may be rigid or semi-rigid plastic, or metal or ceramic and used, e.g., by inserting it down into the open caulk tube and substantially all the way thru the work material, and the syringe then actuated to inject the colorant into the material as tube 149 is slowly withdrawn therefrom to leave a column of colorant longitudinally in the material. The mixer head means 23 may then be fixed into the open tube end by, e.g., the mechanism of FIG. 13, and the mixing process started by any power means such as a hand drill chucked directly onto shaft portion 34.

[0068] It is noted that the configuration of the head means 23, the seal means 24 and the pressure cap means 41 can be varied in accordance with the present invention, such as, for example those shown in FIGS. 2, 11-15 and 20. In FIG. 2, cap section 50 is provided with two or more spring arms 51 which are formed with shoulders 53 adapted to snap in under a shoulder ring 55 affixed around holder 46 as cap section 50 is pushed down over the open neck of the holder with sufficient force to compress seal 62 to a sealing condition. These arms 51 are readily removed from 55 by an outward pull on their lower ends.

[0069] In FIG. 11, cap section 50 and the holder section 46 are provided with mating threads 52 such that adequate sealing pressure can be applied to 62 by a small rotating force applied to the cap. Cap section 50 is preferably knurled as at 47 for allowing hand tightening.

[0070] In FIG. 12 the seal means 24 comprises an elastomeric gripping body 160 having a circular periphery 162 which is dimensioned in diameter to slide down into the filler end 20 of a caulking tube. A bushing 164 having threads 165 is axially mounted thru bore 28 in body 160 and has its inner end 161 non-rotatably fixed to a plate 166 as by welding at 167. Shaft 32 is rotatably, slidably mounted thru a bore 168 in the bushing. A washer 170 preferably of low friction metal or plastic material is mounted over the bushing and a nut 172 is threaded over the bushing. The upper end 171 of bushing 164 extends an exaggerated amount above nut 172 to provide wrench flats 173 for holding 164 and body 160 from rotating as nut 172 is tightened against washer 170.

[0071] In use, shaft 32 is mounted thru bore 168 with the mixer impeller lying adjacent plate 166. With the mixer impeller then inserted into a tube thru the tube filler end thereof, body 160 is slid into the filler end to a desired position therein. A wrench is then mounted on flats 173 to hold bushing 164 and washer 166 stationary, and nut 172 is tightened sufficiently to bulge the body 160 radially outwardly to seal and grip against inner surface 22 of the caulking tube. The elastomeric material of body 160 is selected to allow it to sealingly bulge under just a few pounds of pressure from the tightening nut 172.

[0072] With the seal means 24 and mixer impeller means thus positioned in the tube, and with the colorant injected, e.g., deposited in the tube, on or into the work material by drop bottles, syringe, spatula, gel capsules, color packets, mechanical dispenser, or the like, the tube can be hand held or placed within a holder or carriage 77, and the shaft 32 rotated either by a power means such as 44 or, e.g., an electric drill having its chuck fixed to 32. Reciprocation of the mixer head thru the work material relative to the caulking tube can be done by power means such as 42 or by hand.

[0073] Referring to FIGS. 13, 14 and 15 wherein structure substantially equivalent to that of FIG. 12 are numbered the same, bushing 164 is provided with a flat 174 over which a pressure cap 176 of special configuration is mounted. This cap is dimensioned and shaped to slide down over bushing 164 and the open neck 163 of a tube and be held by hand from rotating while nut 172 is tightened against the upper surface 169 of the cap to bulge seal body 160 as at 59. The outer cylindrical wall 178 of the cap prevents excessive outward bulging of the tube neck wherein such bulging might be a problem for some tubes having thin or weak walls. Torque arms 180 on nut 172 allow hand tightening thereof.

[0074] Referring to FIGS. 16-31, the best modes presently known for practicing the present invention are shown therein and wherein certain structures are numbered as in FIGS. 1-15.

[0075] In the embodiments of FIGS. 16 thru 31, the tube 16 is locked to head means 23 in a manner similar to FIGS. 12 and 13. Referring to FIG. 20, head 23 comprises pressure cap means 41 formed to provide a cylindrical recess wall 57 dimensioned for snugly, slidably receiving the filler end 20 of tube 16. The elastomeric body 56 of seal means 24 is substantially cylindrical in shape in its uncompressed condition but is bulged laterally as shown at 59 in its compressed sealing condition wherein the upper portion 27 of the tube 16 is pressured against the bulge 59 to lock the tube to the head means 23.

[0076] Head means 23 further comprises a bushing such as 164 but having a substantially oblong cross-section stem 73 threaded as at 165 and having flats 61 for preventing rotation of the bushing in the mating and substantially oblong aperture 65 provided thru the top 67 of cap means 41 and thru which the bushing can longitudinally slide. A circular tightening knob 69 having internal threads 71 is adapted to be threaded onto bushing 164 and tightened against cap top 67 such that the pressure plate portion 166 of the bushing and top 67 will compress body 56 and bulge it radially to frictionally lock and seal the tube between body 56 and recess wall 57. It is noted that body 56 may have various cross-sectional configurations and constructions such as the

elastomeric, resilient air filled doughnut 75 shown in a compressed operational condition in FIG. 27.

[0077] As shown in FIG. 16 head means 23 with the tube 16 locked thereto is removably affixed to a carriage means 77 of any desired configuration and preferably provided with a retractable positioning pin 79 or equivalent which is adapted to fit within a recess 81 in the wall portion 87 of cap 41 (see FIG. 20) to removably lock head 23 and tube 16 to the carriage 77 in a desired position. Compression spring 83 is compressed between a plug 85 threaded into 77 and a shoulder 86 affixed to pin 79 to continually urge the pin toward an aperture 89 in the carriage, in which aperture the cap 41 is to be locked as hereinafter described.

[0078] In FIG. 16 an apparatus is shown for reciprocating the carriage 77 and tube and comprises a base 91 to which is affixed a stanchion 93 which is slidably mounted thru the carriage and supports at its upper end a header means 95. A threaded spindle 97 is rotatably mounted on base 91 and is threaded thru the carriage and rotatably passes thru a bearing 101 in 95. An electric motor 45 or equivalent is mounted on 95 and its output shaft is connected to spindle 97. This motor is preferably adapted to rotate the spindle at any desired speed and to reverse its rotational direction in order to cycle the carriage and tube up and down at a rate to achieve good mixing. Another electric motor 105 or equivalent is mounted on 95 and is adapted for connection to shaft 32 by a bayonet type connector 103 or equivalent as shown in FIG. 17 wherein pin 107 is on shaft 32 and slot 109 is on the output shaft 111 of the motor.

[0079] The assembly of the head 23 on the carriage 77 with tube attached in operating condition with shaft 32 extending outwardly a desired extent is carried out by positioning the neck portion 113 of the head into channel 115 in the carriage, pulling pin 79 outwardly from aperture 89, moving 113 inwardly until wall portion 87 is laterally within the perimeter of aperture 89, thrusting the head upwardly until shoulder 117 thereon abuts the underside 119 of the carriage, releasing pin 79 to allow it to engage against wall portions 87, and rotating the head until the pin automatically inserts into recess 81 by way of spring 83. At this point the shaft 32 can be extended upwardly by the operators hand force to make the connection shown in FIG. 17. It is noted that where reverse rotation of shaft 32 is desired, a type of connector other than 103 should be used such as, e.g., a set screw. The length of stroke of the carriage is preferably regulated by limit switches or the equivalent in the manner shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. Other types of regulatory means such as light or other radiation sensing devices may, or course, be employed.

[0080] It is noted that for any of the embodiments shown herein the head 23, carriage 77 and tube 16 may be held stationary while the shaft 32 and motor 105 are reciprocated. Such a variation is readily made, for example, by attaching the carriage 77 in fixed position on a lower portion of stanchion 93 and disconnecting it from spindle 97, and removing motor 105 from header 95 and affixing it to a carriage such as 77 as the carriage and its mounting are shown in FIG. 16.

[0081] Referring to FIGS. 19, the phantom lines of 77 in FIG. 20, and to FIG. 20A the assembly of head 23 with carriage 77 can be done by way of (1) making the aperture 89 of a diameter approximately the same as the width of

channel 115 which preferably is only slightly wider than the diameter of neck 113 of the tightening knob 69, (2) dimensioning the head components and the thickness 121 of the carriage such that with the tube 16 clamped by an initial force to the head, the neck 113 can be slid thru channel 115 to aperture 89 and the knob 69 then further tightened a small but sufficient degree to clamp the carriage between the underside 127 of the knob and the top 67 of the pressure cap 41, and (3) employing a compressible pressure element such as 153 comprised of an annular metal washer component 154 and an annular elastomeric buffer component 155 wherein bushing 164 is slidable thru the center opening 156 of said element and wherein said buffer component is less compressible than body 56 such that seal body 56 will bulge tightly against the tube wall before said buffer component compresses to the point where the underside 157 of knob 69 tightly engages carriage 77. It is preferred that 154 and 155 be adhesively affixed to each other and that 156 be adhesively affixed to the top 67 of pressure cap means 41.

[0082] The most preferred shaft seal 64 is shown in FIG. 24 wherein an annular metal housing 135 is adhesively affixed to an annular or ring seal 137 of elastomeric material. The most preferred impeller 38 is disc shaped as shown in FIGS. 22 and 23 wherein the mixing blades are in the form of slots 138 tapered from about 30 to about 50 degrees, and wherein the direction of rotation of shaft 32 is clockwise. The construction greatly reduces the whipping of air into the caulk mass during mixing. The bottom 139 of the impeller disc is slightly concaved such that the tube seal 141 will not be damaged if the impeller comes into contact with the tube bottom.

[0083] As shown in FIG. 26 multiple channels 115 and apertures 89 may be provided in the carriage 77 for simultaneous multiple mixings. Stanchion slide guides such as 143 against which the carriage is vertically slidable may be provided to prevent rotation of the carriage during mixing. In FIG. 29 an alternative to knob 69 is shown as a pair of opposed arms having smooth hemispherical ends 145 for easy gripping and rotation.

[0084] Referring to FIG. 28, the seal means 24 comprises a slightly tapered, e.g., 1-5 degrees cylindrical recess wall 57 into which the open filler end of tube 16 is pushed. The frictional contact of the tube with wall 57 is sufficient to seal the tube end and stabilize the shaft 32 axis and impeller within the tube such that rotation and reciprocation of the shaft can proceed smoothly without dislocation of the head 23 from the tube. In FIG. 30 the tapered wall 158 provides the seal and frictional lock of the head to the tube.

[0085] For these embodiments which afford quick and easy on-the-job mixing, the cap 41 is preferably provided with ridge projections 39 spaced around the cap for gripping such that in addition to pushing or pulling the tube, rotation of the cap on the tube can be facilitated to ensure proper sealing and to assist in removal of the tube from the head. Also for this embodiment the rotative power means preferably comprises a hand or palm held and small size battery operated electrical motor with its output shaft integral with shaft 32 such that all of the structures of head means 23 desired for convenient and expeditious mixing are integrated into a single hand held unit falling within the ambit of "combination" as used herein.

[0086] In another and highly preferred embodiment of the present invention, particularly the fully hand held and hand

operated version as shown in FIG. 31, shaft 32 is provided with a handle 147 by which the operator can reciprocate shaft 32 and impeller 38 without having to rotate the shaft and impeller to intimately mix the caulk and colorant. It is preferred that for this operation, after the colorant is added thru the open top of tube 16, the following procedure is followed:

[0087] 1. Insert shaft 32 and impeller 38 all the way down into the tube thru the caulk wherein 38 is proximate dispensing end 18 of the tube;

[0088] 2. Position and tighten head means 23 in the tube fill end to seal the tube whereby the pressure within the tube is ambient;

[0089] 3. Withdraw the shaft and impeller to proximate the tube fill end whereby the pressure within the tube becomes less than ambient, e.g., 7-10 psi., and whereby air which was originally entrained within the caulk now tends to escape therefrom; and

[0090] 4. Reciprocating, e.g., 10-50 times, the shaft and impeller within the tube between said fill end and said dispensing end whereby the pressure within said tube cycles between ambient, e.g., 14.7 psi., and less than ambient, e.g., 7-10 psi and whereby said colorant is intimately mixed into the caulk.

[0091] It is apparent, of course, that the above procedure can be carried out by the use of automatic or semi-automatic type reciprocating equipment such as that shown in FIG. 116 but without the need for a motor 104, wherein the outer end of shaft 32 simply could be clamped in a non-rotative position on stanchion 93 during the mixing operation.

[0092] It is noted that the head variations of FIGS. 28, 30 and 31 may be provided with means for mounting them on carriage 77 such as recess 81 formed in the sides thereof for receiving a pin such as 79.

[0093] In order for the preferred and best mode embodiments of the present invention to work properly and to produce the most convenient and expeditious mixing results, the pressure cap means 41 must be so constructed that it does not interfere with or impede the operators hand gripping of the tube 16 as the operator is assembling or disassembling the head 23 and tube and, if desired, as the operator is holding the tube during the mixing operation. To this end and with the cap affixed to the tube, the downwardly depending wall 178 or other portions of the pressure cap should allow at least about a hands width of at least about four inches of the tube dispensing end 18 to protrude beyond wall 178. Therefore, it is preferred that a total length of the cylindrical recess wall 57 of pressure cap means 41 does not exceed three inches even where a reciprocating apparatus as shown in FIG. 16 is employed since proper placement of the head and tube in the carriage means 77 is greatly facilitated where the operator can hand grip the tube. It is noted that an experienced operator by hand gripping a tube 16 can remove thrust cap seal 17, feed additive thru the tube filler end 20, assemble the head 23 onto the filler end 20, run and/or reciprocate the shaft 32 and impeller 38 to mix the components, remove the head from the tube, and replace seal 17 in the tube in less than 30 seconds, particularly when the combination is only hand supported during the mixing operation.

[0094] The invention has been described in detail with particular reference to preferred embodiments thereof, but it will be understood that variations and modifications will be effected with the spirit and scope of the invention.

I claim:

1. Apparatus for mixing colorant with viscous material which is contained in a reservoir of an elongated cylindrical walled tube between a sealed dispensing end and an open filler end thereof, said reservoir being provided by a cylindrical inner surface of the cylindrical wall of said tube and having a substantially uniform diameter, said apparatus comprising a mixer head means having seal means adapted to be brought into static engagement with wall portions of said tube adjacent the filler end opening to lock said head means to said tube and to prevent leakage of said material from said reservoir during a mixing operation, bore means formed thru said seal means substantially on a longitudinal axis of said tube, elongated shaft means mounted thru said bore means for reciprocating axial motion relative to said seal means and said tube, said shaft means having a proximal end lying axially outwardly of said seal means and having a distal end lying within said reservoir, mixer impeller means mounted on said distal end and having peripheral portions adapted to lie closely adjacent to said inner surface of said tube, said proximal end being adapted for engagement with a power source for axially moving said shaft means and impeller means relative to said tube and substantially completely thru said reservoir of material in a reciprocating manner.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein passage means is formed generally axially thru said shaft means whereby fluid colorant can be fed to said material after said seal means is placed in a sealing position against said wall portions of said filler end.

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said peripheral portions are comprised of a cylindrical member affixed to radially outer portions of said impeller means

4. The apparatus of claim 3 wherein said cylindrical member is provided at its periphery with a wiping surface adapted to rotatably and longitudinally slide against or in close proximity to the inner surface of the tube whereby no discernible unmixed material or colorant remains.

5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a colorant supply means is provided to inject the colorant into said material during reciprocation of said shaft means and mixer impeller means thru said material.

6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein said supply means comprises passage means extending longitudinally thru said shaft means whereby colorant can be either pressure injected or gravity fed at a desired rate therethrough into said material either before or during rotation and/or longitudinal mixing movement of said shaft means and impeller means thru said material.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said shaft means and mixer head means are supported on base means in a stationary position and holder means are provided for holding said tube and reciprocating it relative to said shaft means and mixer head means.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein power means is provided for rotating said shaft means and impeller means during the mixing operation to afford maximum mixing turbulence to said material.

9. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said seal means comprises a readily deformable elastomeric body means

having a substantially circular periphery formed around a central axis and having a substantially flat top end and a substantially flat bottom end and adapted to be slid down into said open filler end of said tube, a shaft bore axially formed thru said body means, a shaft mounted thru said bore and rotatable and axially slidable thru said bore, clamping means adapted to engage said top and bottom ends of said body means with sufficient force to bulge said body means radially and seal said periphery against said inner surface of said tube.

10. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein said clamping means comprises a circular cap means having a radially inner and substantially circular pressure face formed to lie around said axis and having a radially outer cylindrical wall means to provide therebetween a circular recess adapted to slidably receive the filler end of said tube whereby said wall means will prevent outward bulging of said filler end of said tube.

11. A mixing method employing a retail, off-the-shelf tube of caulking material wherein the tube has a sealed dispenser end section, a filler end section having surface portions defining a fill opening into the tube, a thrust cap slidably mounted in said filler end section, and further employing a mixer seal means adapted to seal against surface portions of said filler end section during the mixing operation, wherein mixer shaft means is rotatably and axially slidably mounted thru axial bore means in said mixer seal means, and wherein a mixer impeller means is fixed to a distal end portion of said mixer shaft for rotation and axial movement therewith, said method comprising performing the steps of (a) removing said thrust cap from said tube, (b) placing said mixer seal means sealingly against said surface portions of said open filler end section to seal said fill opening with said impeller means head inside of said tube, (c) injecting colorant into contact with said material, (d) starting rotation of said mixer shaft means and impeller means, (e) starting relative reciprocation of said mixer shaft means within said tube, (f) continuing the rotation and reciprocation for a desired mixing period, (g) removing said tube and the colored material therein from said impeller means and mixer seal means, and (h) replacing said thrust cap in said filler end section to retain the colored material in said tube.

12. The method of claim 11 wherein steps (b) and (c) are performed in any order.

13. The method of claim 11 wherein steps (d) and (e) are performed in any order.

14. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said seal means is comprised of transparent material selected from the group consisting of glass or clear plastic.

15. A unitary structural combination of a mixer head means and a cylindrical wall tube of substantially uniform diameter and containing viscous material, said tube and head means having coincident axes, said combination being adapted for mixing additive with said viscous material which is contained in said tube between a sealed dispensing end and an open filler end thereof, said tube wall providing an annular first sealing surface adjacent said filler end, generally axially extending wall means on said head means providing an annular second sealing surface on said head means, said sealing surfaces being in forceful contact with each other and forming a seal therebetween, an axial bore formed thru said head means, a mixer shaft rotatably and reciprocally mounted thru said bore, and a mixer impeller affixed to said distal end, said seal further providing a

physical frictional connection between said tube and head means whereby a direct axial pull force of at least about three pounds would be required to disengage said tube from said head means.

16. The combination of claim 15 wherein force application means is provided on said head means and forcing said second sealing surface into sealing engagement with first sealing surface.

17. The combination of claim 15 wherein said second sealing surface is tapered generally axially and is wedged against said first sealing surface.

18. The combination of claim 15 wherein the taper of said second sealing surface provides a minimum diameter "MD" thereto which is from about 0.004 in., to about 0.060 in., smaller than the uncompressed diameter "UD" of said first sealing surface.

19. A mixer head means adapted for attachment to the open filler end of a cylindrical tube of viscous material, said head means comprising seal means adapted to be brought into static engagement with cylindrical wall portions of the tube adjacent said filler end opening to prevent leakage of said material therethrough during a mixing operation means for forcing said engagement to lock said head means to said tube, bore means formed thru said seal means substantially on a longitudinal axis of said tube, elongated shaft means mounted thru said bore means for both rotational and axial motion relative to said seal means and said tube, said shaft means having a proximal end lying axially outwardly of said seal means and having a distal end adapted to lie within said tube during mixing, and mixer impeller means mounted on said distal end.

20. The head means of claim 19 wherein said seal means comprises tapered cylindrical wall means adapted to wedge and seal against the cylindrical wall portions of the tube.

21. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein handle means is provided on said proximal end of said shaft means and is adapted to be grasped by an operators hand, which operator provides said power source.

22. A mixing method employing a retail, off-the-shelf tube of caulking material wherein the tube has a sealed dispenser end section, a filler end section having end surface portions defining a fill opening into the tube, said section further having outer and inner side wall portions, a thrust cap slidably mounted in said filler end section, and further employing a mixer head means having friction coupling seal means adapted to removably but firmly affix said head means to said tube and form a hermetic seal against said inner side wall portions of said filler end section during the mixing operation, wherein mixer shaft means is axially slidably mounted thru axial bore means in said seal means, and wherein a mixer impeller means is fixed to a distal end portion of said shaft means for axial movement therewith, said method comprising the steps of (a) removing said thrust cap from said tube, (b) introducing colorant into said tube, (c) placing said seal means within said filler end section in proximity to said inner side wall portions while inserting said shaft and impeller means thru said caulking material to position said impeller means adjacent said dispenser end section, (d) forcing said seal means into friction coupling sealing engagement with said inner side wall portions to hermetically seal said fill opening, (e) withdrawing said shaft means and impeller means to proximate the tube fill end whereby the pressure within the tube becomes less than ambient and whereby air which was originally entrained within the caulk now tends to escape therefrom, (f) reciprocating said shaft means and impeller means within the tube between said fill end and said dispensing end whereby the pressure within said tube cycles between ambient and less than ambient and whereby said colorant is intimately mixed into the caulk without entraining an excessive amount of air into said material, (g) removing said tube and the colored material therein from said impeller means and mixer seal means, and (h) replacing said thrust cap in said filler end-section to retain the colored material in said tube.

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